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## BOOK REVIEW

Prostate Diseases

### A cultural biography of the prostate

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The prostate is an object of medical attention. It is also a source of much anxiety. It triggers worry about cancer and death, of course, but also about erectile dysfunction, loss of libido, and about being constantly tormented by need to "pee like an old man". These physical changes, which are often attributed to prostate problems, also have social

implications for men, their relationships, and their participation in social and cultural activities. These worries stem from norms and values about manhood, changing sexual abilities and desires related to age, changing bodies and their implications for masculinity, and aging in general. And of course, the fear of dying from cancer.

All of these anxieties – about sexuality, masculinity, aging, health and death – are shaping how we think about the prostate. They are shaping how we talk about it, diagnose it, treat it, and treat the men who have lost it. *A Cultural Biography of the Prostate*<sup>1</sup> (**Figure 1**) traces their appearance in cultural and medical conversations and knowledge, examining the history of prostate treatments, how it is treated today, what patients are often met by when they seek care, and what those medical technologies (especially the PSA test) do to men who are worried about their prostates or have had it removed. It is the result of a seven year, interdisciplinary research project in the medical humanities, conducted at Linköping University, Sweden.

*A Cultural Biography of the Prostate* draws on historical and modern sources, medical texts, and cultural discussions about the prostate. It is also based on interviews with men who have experienced prostate problems, and with medical professionals whose careers have helped those men. The research revealed pressing anxieties and distressing treatments aroused by prostate problems, and the implications these have for the way men feel they can be men. Men – and the people close to them – are worried about the prostate, about treating it, or about losing it. For being a topic of conversation one often tries to avoid – because who brings up the prostate at a dinner party? – the prostate is surprisingly present in our cultural imaginary. This book traces the contours of that presence.

#### REFERENCE

- 1 Johnson E. *A Cultural Biography of the Prostate*. Boston: MIT Press; 2021.

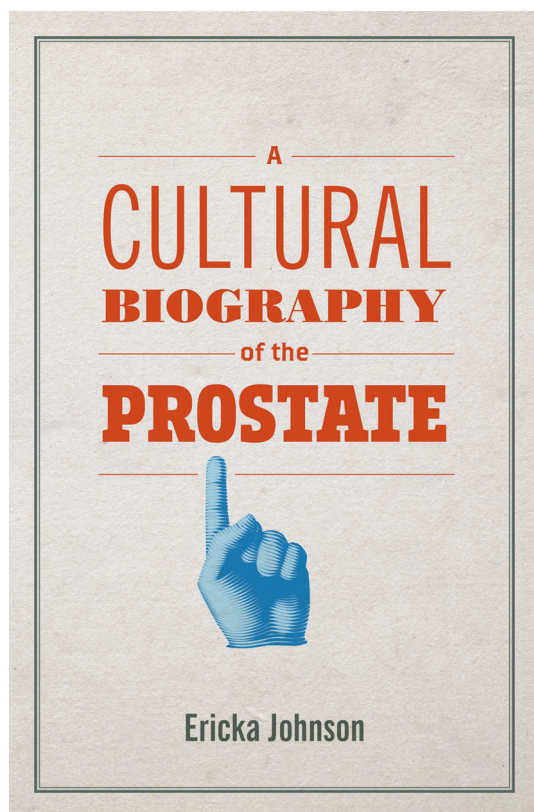
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**Figure 1:** The cover image of the book *A Cultural Biography of the Prostate*.